

Statement by Rep. James A. Leach
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
“The Six-Party Talks and the North Korean Nuclear Issue”
October 6, 2005

I would like to begin by commending Assistant Secretary Hill and his team for their diplomatic creativity, professionalism, and tenacity during the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks. During our trip to Pyongyang last month, Mr. Lantos and I received a preview of the newly-hardened North Korean stance that Ambassador Hill encountered during that last round. It is clear that any progress was hard-won.

In terms of process, it is ironic that U.S. Government policy -- previously criticized for being too unilateral -- was criticized as too multilateral during the formative stages of the Six-Party process. While auxiliary cultural exchanges should be developed and bilateral government contacts expanded, the Six-Party framework remains the most credible primary forum for pursuing resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem. In this connection, this Committee is obligated to take note of the constructive leadership of China in hosting the talks.

Turning to the product of the most recent round of Beijing meetings, it bears emphasizing that the Joint Statement is an assertion of principles to guide future negotiations; it is not an implementable agreement. As awkward as some of the language of the Joint Statement is, Assistant Secretary Hill's strategy of beginning the process with a Statement of Principles is promising, perhaps visionary. There must, however, be a realistic recognition that the more difficult portions of the process lie ahead, not behind. Any attempt to declare either victory or failure on the basis of the Statement of Principles is premature. But my personal sense is one of optimism. While the Joint Statement is open to conflicting interpretations and has already revealed differing national priorities among the parties, it does provide a directional basis for the more substantial, nuanced work ahead.

One can begin to discern a credible assumption of mutual self-interest among the parties, which could ultimately lead to agreement based on: economic and energy incentives provided to North Korea largely by nations other than the United States; greater normalization of relations between the

U.S. and the D.P.R.K. with certain security assurances provided by the United States; and, first and foremost, the categorical reversal of nuclear initiatives by North Korea.

At this point, the key remaining issues concern the depth of North Korean commitment to genuine denuclearization, the timing and sequencing of commitments and actions in subsequent agreements, and the extent of common purpose and coordination among the U.S. and the other parties to the talks.

The most profound question remains: "Whose side is time on?" From an American perspective, we have no interest in the status quo, which allows North Korea to pursue the headlong development of additional nuclear weapons and materials. By the same token, North Korea also should have no interest in the status quo, which means its continued isolation from the progressive economic and social march of the rest of Asia.

Let me conclude by affirming my solidarity with Secretary Hill and the Administration in seeking substantive progress from North Korea at the earliest possible date. We cannot remain content with affirmations of common principles if North Korea continues to reprocess plutonium and construct new reactors, as was represented to my delegation during our visit to Pyongyang. I look forward to Assistant Secretary Hill's views on these seminal issues, and thank him for making himself available to the Committee this morning.
